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CRITICAL NOTICE.<sup>1</sup>

*The Book of Psalms. A new Translation, with Commentary.* By the Rev. Prof. CHEYNE, Canon of Rochester. London, 1888.

PROF. CHEYNE'S translation of the Psalms in the Parchment Library must have caused many a student to await the larger work, which was known to be in preparation, with considerable impatience. The volume now before us will not disappoint them, but they will find that the story is still "to be continued." The Professor's exposition of the Psalms will not be complete till after the publication of a subsequent volume (the Bampton lectures for 1889), for which, as he tells us, "the higher criticism and the consideration of Psalm theology" have been reserved. This method of dealing with his subject in two divisions has obvious advantages, but it is not altogether without inconvenience. Of many psalms, for instance, the full meaning cannot be grasped unless they are viewed in relation to their date of composition. But questions concerning date belong to the "higher criticism," and therefore they are usually studiously put aside in the present commentary. Sometimes Prof. Cheyne will give two explanations of a particular verse, the one suitable for an earlier date, the other for a later one. It is true that his own view is frequently indicated, either directly or by implication; but the full bearing and value of some psalms as wholes, or of individual passages, when regarded in the light of the circumstances under which the commentator supposes them to have been written, are not put before us in Prof. Cheyne's present volume. Let us hope that the Bampton Lectures will, in their published form at any rate, be detailed enough to supply all that now is wanting. Where theological questions are involved, Prof. Cheyne seems inclined to hold that the first business of a commentator is to explain the actual wording with emphatic clearness, and thus to render the student subsequently more prepared to draw independent conclusions on matters relating to the higher criticism. Perhaps that is the reason why, for instance, his precise views as to the date of many portions of Isaiah are not to be found in his commentary, but in his article upon Isaiah in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Prof. Cheyne's book is not only intended for the scholar, but also for the general reader, who may be supposed to have either a slight and superficial knowledge of the original text or to be quite ignorant of Hebrew. Both divisions are represented in the Jewish community, and it is greatly to be hoped that many will take the trouble to read the new translation and commentary. What Prof. Cheyne, quoting the late Prof. Brewer, fears of Christians is equally true, we should imagine, of Jews, that "the present generation, almost too familiar with the Church versions, 'has broken down the strong meaning of the Psalmist's words into the devotional dust of vague generalities.'"

Prof. Cheyne's translation has already stood the test of criticism, since

<sup>1</sup> In 1889 a Bibliography of the most important Biblical and Rabbinical works will be given. A section will also be devoted to "Notes and Discussion."

the edition in the Parchment Library made its appearance some four years ago. That translation is repeated in his larger work, but with frequent modifications, nearly always, as we think, for the better. Its great object is its great merit: clearness and accuracy. So far as (even apart from textual emendations) the Psalmist's words can be immediately understood by a close and clear English rendering, the general reader will obtain this desideratum in the translation before us.

Prof. Cheyne is never vague, and his choice of words, where it lies outside the vocabulary of the A. V. or the R. V., adds almost invariably a required conciseness and precision to the translation. We think also that, from a literary point of view, he has been more successful than in the Parchment Library. His English reads now more smoothly. Considerations of space forbid quotations of excellences which we trust all readers of this review may find out and enjoy for themselves. If we now proceed to make a few objections and cite some few lines where improvement seems desirable, it is with the hope that we may thereby, possibly, in some slight degree, contribute to the improvement of an admirable work in a subsequent edition.

To begin with, Prof. Cheyne's rendering is occasionally all too literal. The old "Avert thy frown, that I may *gleam* again," has now been changed to "that I may *smile* again" (xxxix. 14); but "*roll* (the care of thy way) upon Jehovah" (xxxvii. 5; cf. xxii. 9) still remains. "Pouring out my soul *upon* me" (xlii. 5; cf. xlii. 6; xliii. 5; cxxxi. 2; cxlii. 4) follows a Hebrew idiom, but not an English one. Metaphorical usages of words, such as we find in sentences like "God, who *lops off* the passion of princes" (lxxvi. 13), "when the promise of the Lord had *assayed* him" (cv. 19; cf. xvii. 3), or "I *rent wide* my mouth and panted" (cxix. 131), are scarcely allowable in English. The literal rendering of the metaphor in the verb נָבַע is permissible in such verses as xix. 3, and cxix. 171; but "the fame of thy abundant goodness shall they send as from a well-spring" (cxlv. 7) sounds exceedingly strange.

Sometimes, but very rarely, a more elegant choice of words would seem desirable. The following are cases in point: xviii. 45; l. 21c; lxxiii. 4b and 27b; lxxvii. 17b; lxxx. 7b; cxvi. 2b; cxxvii. 2c. In a few instances, again, the order and cadence of the older versions seem unnecessarily disturbed. See, for instance, xix. 6b and 12; xxxiii. 13a; xxxiv. 10b; cxiii. 3b; cxvi. 4a. In xci. 6, is "the pestilence that *darkling roams*" an improvement over "the pestilence that walketh in darkness" of the A. V., R. V., and Book of Common Prayer? Again, in cxlviii. 12, Prof. Cheyne's version, "Youths in their prime and damsels too, aged men by the side of boys," does not compare favourably with the older and simpler, "Both young men and maidens, old men and children."

There are four Hebrew words constantly occurring in the Psalter, the English rendering of which by Prof. Cheyne seems open to objection. The first is the verb מוּט, which the Professor usually translates by "totter." This word, instead of the somewhat colourless "to be moved" of A. V. and R. V., may perhaps be applied to a city or a kingdom, as in xlvi. 6 and 7, but the "earth" or the "world" as a whole, is too large a thing to "totter" (lx. 4; lxxxii. 5; xciii. 1; xcvi. 10). Twice, moreover, is "totter" applied to men, and in neither case with propriety. "He will not always appoint tottering for the righteous" (lv. 23; cp. cxi. 11) reads very awkwardly. Secondly, why should Prof. Cheyne, who, as a rule eschews archaism, translate יָנָה by "naughtiness" instead of "iniquity"? Though the rendering be etymologically more accurate, it makes the general reader think of the petty wrong-doings of the nursery, rather than of the full-blown crimes of manhood. (For another, as it seems to us, unnecessary archaism, cp. ix. 9; lxxii. 2; xcvi. 10.)

Nor, thirdly, is the advantage clear in substituting "ungodly" for "wicked," as the equivalent of the Hebrew רשע. Prof. Cheyne himself tells us in his note on i. 1, that "whatever be the root meaning of רשע, the word is certainly the opposite of צדיק," and moreover that "there is no occasion (except in Ps. cxix.) to assign to רשע, 'the ungodly,' the sense which ἀσεβής has in Josephus, ἀνομος in 1 Macc., viz., 'one unfaithful to the true religion.'" By rendering the word "ungodly" instead of "wicked," the fact of its exact opposition to צדיק, is, as it seems to us, obscured, and its connotation suggests precisely the very sense which Prof. Cheyne himself tells us it is unnecessary, except in Ps. cxix., to assign to it. Lastly, it would be a boon if the Professor could think of another rendering for the troublesome root רנן. This verb and its derivative noun occur over thirty times in the Psalter. Prof. Cheyne has an interesting note on its first appearance in v. 12, and refers for further details to a critical note which, however, we have failed to discover. He usually renders the verb by such expressions as "ring out one's joy," "ring out one's gladness," "give a ringing cry," "ring out," and the like. The noun is rendered by "ringing cry." It is, however, very rarely that these renderings seem in place, and Prof. Cheyne has twice at least to abandon them (lxiii. 8; cxlv. 5). "My tongue shall ring out thy righteousness" (li. 16; cxlv. 7), sounds very strange; not less so, perhaps, "let all the trees of the forest give a ringing cry." But readers will most object to "ringing cries," when they find them substituted for the familiar though less exact "joy" of the A. V. in such a passage as cxxvi. 5, "They that sowed with tears shall reap with ringing cries" (cp. xxx. 6). Will not the Professor have pity upon us, and in his next edition restore us our "joy"?

All these points, however, are merely details. The great merits of the Professor's book remain untouched by them. After having outstripped all previous English Commentators on Isaiah, he has now done the same with the Psalms. Those who have time and opportunity will do well to follow Prof. Cheyne's advice, and compare with his own other independent versions of the Psalter. But those who can only buy or read one translation and commentary will do foolishly if they let that single one be another than Cheyne's.

For the first time, moreover, in any English translation, those frequent absurdities and puzzles are removed, which must so constantly have annoyed and perplexed any ordinarily and intelligent reader of the Authorised, or even the Revised, Version. Prof. Cheyne has introduced a considerable number of textual emendations. These emendations have been most judiciously chosen, and have been culled from a variety of sources. In fact, Prof. Cheyne's work is the only one, so far as we are aware, in any language which gives a complete translation of the Psalter from a text revised by the best emendations of all European scholars. In Prof. Graetz's edition the emendations are so numerous, and frequently so unnecessary, that its use would be highly misleading for the general reader. "The truly felicitous suggestions," which, as Prof. Cheyne says, he has "now and then made," will be found duly utilised and acknowledged in the present edition. The reader may be assured that in every case where Prof. Cheyne has admitted an emendation, the corruption of the received text is a matter of almost absolute certainty. A considerable number of Prof. Cheyne's emendations are due to Bickell, and the Professor's book has the advantage of putting before English readers, for the first time, some of the happiest results of that scholar's criticism, as well as of those of Baethgen, Dyserinck, and Graetz. Prof. Cheyne tells us in his preface that, out of regard for his readers and his printers, he has limited the amount of his critical notes, which account for and explain

his innovations, to the most essential points. These notes are, however, by no means the least interesting portion of his book, and it were to be wished that more space should be assigned to them in a second edition. We may notice here that critical notes are referred to in the Commentary on the following passages, but are not to be found: v. 12; xvi. Introd., fin.; xix. 14; xxxi. 22; xl. 18; lxv. 10; cxxvii. 2; cxxxix. 14, and cxliii. 8.

Turning now to the Commentary, it has already been noticed that it must, to some extent, have suffered, as regards completeness, from the restriction which the author imposed upon himself in matters of "the higher criticism and psalm theology." Nevertheless it seems to us that it is precisely on theological or spiritual points where the Commentary is most fresh, valuable, and suggestive. Prof. Cheyne has certainly won from the great Ewald "the secret of the reconciliation of faith and criticism" (Preface, p. xvii.). He is sympathetic to spiritual utterances from whatever source, and a valuable feature in his commentary is the frequent citation of appropriate parallel passages from Assyrian, Egyptian, and other literatures, as well as from the Koran. His commentary is thoroughly up to date on all details of philological and theological inquiry; but his learning and his knowledge of origins do not make him the less susceptible to the full meaning of the deeper utterances of the Psalmists. While he does not read modern notions into ancient texts, he nevertheless does full justice to the wealth of spiritual teaching which the Psalter contains. Note the manner in which he explains the mythological basis and subsequent spiritualisation of various metaphors and phrases (cp. xvii. 15; xxii. 4; xxiv. 10; xxxvi. 10; xlix. 15; lxv. 10; cx. 3). He throws considerable fresh light upon the Angelology of the Psalter, and gives very strong reasons for his unusual rendering of Psalms lviii. and lxxxii. (cp., besides those two psalms, his notes on xxix. 1; xxxiv. 8; lxxxix. 6, 7; xcvi. 4; xcvi. 7; and civ. 4). The two fundamental ethical and religious conceptions of the Psalmists, *חֶסֶד* and *אֱמֶת* are most interestingly dealt with by Prof. Cheyne. He shows clearly their relation to the covenant of God with Israel, and the manner of their ethical and religious fusion. All his notes, and they are many, upon these words should be very carefully worked through by the student. His translation of *חֶסֶד* by "man of love" (xii. 1; xxxii. 6), or "loving ones," is bold, but certainly to be commended. We may notice here that the national view of the Psalms has never been better worked out and explained than by Prof. Cheyne. Several passages receive a new or more adequate meaning when explained from this point of view (cp., for instance, li. 6; xxv. 7; cxxvii. 1). Occasionally, perhaps, the fusion between individual and national meanings is explained too subtly, as, for instance, in li. 13. (Over-subtlety, that bane of the German commentator, is conspicuously wanting in Prof. Cheyne's book. We have only noted, besides li. 13, l. 16, 17, xciv. 10, and cxxxiii. 3.)

We are glad to notice that in the vexed verses respecting "immortality" or "resurrection" in Psalms xvi., xvii., xlix., and lxxiii., Prof. Cheyne argues forcibly that the words of the Psalmists must not be whittled down to a mere expectation of "deliverance from death." He very properly stigmatises this view, herein, if we remember rightly, following Calvin, as "the weakest of explanations." In the Bampton Lectures we hope that more upon this deeply interesting question will be forthcoming for us. Valuable as the note on xvi. 10 is, it is not quite sufficiently definite. But its subject belongs to "the higher criticism and psalm theology," and we must therefore be content to wait for a fuller and more definite exposition.

In all the other portions of the Commentary the reader will find there

great features of excellence equally well represented. All the information given is clear, sober, and up to date. In very few passages only might it be desirable that the Commentary—even after one has “worked” at it conscientiously, and allowing for a proper amount of “Orientalism” (Preface, p. x.)—should be rather clearer or more explicit (cp. xviii. 26, lxxvii. 10, cxxxix. 16). One word more, as to typographical arrangement. Would it be asking too much to suggest that, in the next edition, the book should be printed after the manner of Prof. Jebb’s edition of Sophocles? The critical notes are there printed immediately below the text and translation, and the commentary is placed in double columns below that. At a single opening you have text, translation, critical notes and commentary all before you. With Prof. Cheyne you have to keep looking from the translation to the commentary, and then on to the critical notes at the end of the book—to say nothing of keeping half an eye upon the Hebrew text in another volume. If the translation on each page corresponded with the commentary below, and the critical notes were inserted in smaller type between the two, the study of the book (even without the insertion of the revised text) would be greatly facilitated. Again, it would be an advantage were Prof. Cheyne to prefix an explanatory letter to each verse—not, as in the Parchment Library, to each psalm—where the received text has in any way been changed. A “*t*” might stand for a transposition, “*o*” for an omission, “*a*” for an addition, “*p*” for a change in the pointing, “*l*” for a change of a single letter, and “*e*” for an emendation of a whole word. The general reader would then be able to see at a glance the nature and extent of the textual changes adopted.

In a review published in a specifically Jewish magazine, it should possibly be mentioned that Prof. Cheyne’s commentary never receives a definitely Christian or perhaps, we should say, Christological character. (The fuller consideration of the Messianic utterances of the Psalmists is naturally reserved for the second volume.) Only, perhaps, in the introduction to Psalm xxii. would the Jewish prepossessions of the present writer (for there are Jewish prepossessions in exegesis just as there are Christian prepossessions) take exception to any explanation of the Professor’s. That Psalm, he tells us, it is important to compare with other Psalms, “some of which may be adequately explained as utterances of pious Israel, while others (as xxxv., I hesitate to add lxix.) seem to have a fuller significance.” He considers that “Psalm xxii. is most probably a description, under the form of a dramatic monologue, of the ideal Israelite, called by a kindred writer ‘the covenant of the people,’ and the ‘light of the nations’ (Isa. xlii. 7), who shall rise out of the provisional church-nation, and, identifying himself with it, lead it on to spiritual victory.” When, however, we refer to the introduction of Psalm xxxv., which is the other Psalm mentioned as possessing “a fuller significance,” we find Prof. Cheyne inclined to think it “safer to regard the individualising features as a poetical ornament.” If Psalm xxii. did not possess peculiar historical and traditional importance in Christian theology, it is, we cannot help thinking, likely that Prof. Cheyne would also hold it safer to regard “its individualising features as poetical ornament.” We doubt, at all events, whether he would construe it prophetically as a description of the ideal Israelite, who had not yet appeared when the Psalmist wrote.

In conclusion, we have only to urge upon all readers of this review the importance and excellence of Prof. Cheyne’s work, and the necessity which every student of the Psalms is under to make himself thoroughly familiar with the whole of its contents.

C. G. MONTEFIORE.